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AUTHOR Viaggio, Sergio
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ABSTRACT

Translators must understand what they translate, but oral language is generally more redundant than written language and the translator need not repeat everything he hears. One method of teaching this skill is to have students sight translate a text in its entirety and then abridge it to its minimum informative content. Abstracting and compressing are keys to dealing with speech that is too rapid. Abstracting is like precis writing, requiring thorough analysis of the text with rigorous hierarchization of its content. Compressing involves condensing of the text's form. Interpreters should be taught to think of the shortest synonym or equivalent first. Two United Nations speeches in English, translated into Spanish, provide illustrations of the quantitative and qualitative differences between a good semantic translation, an abstract, and a compressed text, and also of the disastrous results of over-abstraction. While translators should not necessarily abstract or compress in all translating situations, they should be trained and practiced in the necessary skills for the situations that either allow for or demand an abstract or compressed text. (Contains 15 endnotes and 24 references.) (MSE)

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Teaching Beginners the Blessings of Abstracting and Compressing (And How to Save a Few Lives in the Process)*

by Sergio Viaggio, U.N.

There is a healthy axiom according to which in order to translate one must understand and, therefore, one simply cannot translate what one has not comprehended. From that standpoint, the added difficulty of simultaneous interpretation would lie in the 'orality' of the original text,1/ i.e. in that a) the linguistic information comes in sequentially - and following a sequence partly imposed by the syntactic rules of the source language; b) it cannot be reviewed or checked; c) the interpreter has no control whatsoever over the rate at which the information is crammed into his ears, and therefore the time he has to process it; and d) it is subject to a myriad possible interferences, from a faulty microphone to a dreadful accent. Unlike the translator, then, the interpreter seems to be completely at the mercy of his speaker. But is he really?

Let us take a closer look at our axiom. What do we actually mean by understand? The uneducated wisdom assumes it is the 'language', as transpired in the specific text: the 'words'. Needless to say, if the interpreter does not know the language, he is in deep trouble; but what if he does not know all the words? What indeed if he does? The first thing a would-be translator should learn and assimilate is that there is a crucial, heavenly difference between language and thought,2/ meaning (linguistic) and sense (extra-linguistic).3/ He should be made aware that language is never used for its own sake, but rather as a vehicle for ideas, i. e. 'sense'. It is those ideas, that sense, that must be captured and relayed. Nothing short of it, but --and this is essential-- nothing more. That sense will, of course, be basically carried by words; but a) not all the words, and b) not just the words. That is to say that, depending on the specific instance, linguistic information, fundamental as it may be, need not be indispensable or enough. If I'm asked whether I can spare a million dollars and reply 'Sure!', my answer does not pose any linguistic problems of interpretation (the way the question did not). Now, both question and answer might seem oddly out of place. Who would seriously inquire of me whether I could actually spare a million bucks? Of course, no one need be asking seriously; but how do we know the question is facetious? Because of the situation. Both question and reply, as indeed every single text, are situated, and their linguistic meaning is therefore interpreted as a mirror image of their sense, or precisely the opposite, or any possible combination of faithfulness to or distortion thereof.

In our case, the most obvious clues would be tone and gesture - two features not inherent to linguistic meaning... Except in this particular instance there has been neither: both have been purely conjectural. We assume them to have accompanied the actual elocution because our prior knowledge of the extra-linguistic

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situation led us to believe they were facetious and we therefore expected the corresponding intonation and other non-linguistic markers of sense.

Granted; this is an example not easily extrapolated to translation. Granted; even if well taken, its translation would be linguistically 'equivalent'; as a matter of fact, the translator/interpreter need not guess the right sense to come up with a faithful linguistic translation which may then lend itself to the right 're-interpretation' by the user. Texts tend to be much longer and more complicated than that. But they are all acts of la parole, speech-acts, situated. It is the situation that makes their linguistic meaning 'meaningful' and relevant. The same linguistic chunk of speech will acquire different sense subject to who uttered it, when, where, how and to whom; and who perceived it, when, where, how and from whom. There is a situation in which the text is produced by its sender, and then there is the situation in which it is processed by its addressee (and, in our case, an intermediate situation in which it is translated). They may coincide in everything but the different psychologies of two people, or diverge in almost every conceivable respect but the mere external linguistic trappings. When the text is translated, not even that remains.

On paper, save a few bold-types and the like, all words look equal, but they do not equally contribute to meaning or sense. When we speak, we have all our body, vocal chords, facial muscles, fingers, etc. at our disposal. Thus, lots of information is carried para-linguistically, making for an additional source of redundancy. Still, not all that we actually say contributes equally to meaning or to sense. Supposing we meant every word we utter or write, their importance from the point of view of the whole message will be uneven. Not everything we write or say is essential. There always is a voluntary or involuntary degree of redundancy. Part of what we utter is the point we want to make, part of it just its bedding. Of the several points we may wish to get across, some are more important than others. All of this paragraph does not convey, in essence, anything more than 'we talk longer than we really need'.

Teaching the translator the difference between meaning and sense should be a matter of principle. Instilling it in the interpreter is one of survival. One decisive advantage of interpretation, as opposed to translation, is that the latter always presupposes displaced situationality. In interpretation, situationality is, by definition, shared by speaker, interpreter and both their respective audiences. Students are seldom, if ever, made aware of this circumstance and the way it can and should be exploited. Shared situationality, added to the orality of the spoken text, makes for a much higher degree of redundancy.4/ Interpreters need not translate every single word uttered by the speaker; as a matter of fact, most of the times it is undesirable to do so, even when one is perfectly able to. Why? Because if the ad lib by a speaker is basically rooted in the style of verbal

communication, the interpretation will tend to be couched in that of written texts, which will normally be less redundant.

The student should know, from the very beginning, that he cannot be expected to 'say it all', nor should he demand it of himself either. He must realise that he is dealing with the competing efforts of comprehension, processing and production;5/ that, initially, understanding will use up well nigh all of his attention, with little left for processing and next to nothing for delivery. That being the inescapable fact of life, he simply won't be able to 'say it all'. The question, then, is what not to say. This analytical discrimination demands intelligent listening: listening not for words, but for ideas (i.e deverbalisation).6/ It further demands discrimination between ideas themselves; not only with a view to determine their relative importance (for the speaker and/or the interpreter's audience), but the degree to which they are not known already or conveyable by para-linguistic means, all of which makes their utterance --in principle-- redundant.

Intelligent listening being a difficult skill to master, we should be well advised to teach it separately, by way of intelligent reading. In my course I try and kill two birds with one stone 7/ by combining this exercise with that of sight translation. My students are required to sight translate a text ('saying it all') and then abridge it to its bare minimum informative content as perceived by the speaker and/or the audience. By now I think I must explain the underlined or: It can happen that part of the information in a text is addressed primarily to those who can understand it in the original or a third language, but becomes less important, or even totally superfluous, to whomever is listening to a specific interpretation.

A typical example from my U.N. practice: The delegate from Yemen congratulates the British chairman; the speaker wants the addressee to get all his flowers; the addressee wants them delivered intact; the Spanish audience don't care one bit. The English interpreter may not do away with them, but the Spanish interpreter can (again, not that he should). If speed were a big problem in this instance, and the interpreter could not help using his scissors, the Spanish audience would much rather he discarded anything not having to do specifically with the position of Yemen, because that is exactly what they are listening for (by the way, in the same emergency, the English interpreter should be well advised to do likewise, albeit at a greater risk of retaliation - in any event; let him be guided by his assessment of the situation, cross his fingers and hope for the best). And if the interpreter were forced to cut even into that, then let him do away first with what he can assume his audience already know about Yemen's position.

It may be argued that any interpreter ought to translate 'everything' no matter what, it not being his job or his business to rate his speaker's ideas. I won't dispute it (though I most vehemently could). The point is that very often it is simply

impossible. And even if it were not, it will be definitely impossible for the beginner, let alone the student. What are they to do? Cut whenever short of breath? Intelligent listening is crucial to a crucial principle of interpretation: resource management; and when the interpreter's resources are scant, it pays double to administer them wisely. This, to my knowledge, is seldom taught, and both students and beginners are left to invent the wheel on their own.

Abstracting and compressing 8/ are clues to overcoming the students' nemesis: the 'he's-going-too-fast-for-me' syndrome. Nonsensical, sweaty, fidgety blabbering becomes poised enunciation. Only ten sentences out of a full speech may be little, but it is something; one thousand disconnected words is nothing. Neither, of course, is enough; but it is ostensibly saner the next time around to try and get more ideas than more words. In Seleskovitch's accurate aphorism, students must learn 'to balance their listening between hearing sense on the one hand and hearing their own speech make sense on the other hand'.9/ Demystification of words must be the first priority of every translation and interpretation teacher.10/

Sometimes both concepts get mixed up. Abstracting is akin to precis writing, the stuff consecutive interpretation is made of. It requires a very thorough analysis of the text with a view to a rigorous hierarchisation of its content. Precisely because of that, it cannot be mastered 'on the go', and necessitates, therefore, the whole communicative or functional 'perspective' of the text. One more reason for interpreters to step on the same stones as translators before parting ways. Needless to say, it is the first step of the two. If abstracting implies 'content-slicing', compressing is, in the final analysis, but mere 'syllable-shrinking'. It requires, on top of the ability to understand the content, adroitness at condensing the form. It is, then, more a matter of linguistic competence, of being able to find the briefest and aptest ways of expression. Again, it cannot be mastered 'on the go'; translators and interpreters still belong in the same classroom.

Interpreters should be specifically asked to think of the 'shortest' synonym or equivalent first, since there's is little point in wasting in the seeking the time saved in the uttering. They must make a habit of having it on the tip of their tongues: the shortest synonym of 'después', for instance, is 'tras', which not only is half as long, but does not demand the 'de', which makes it two thirds shorter. The absolute gerund or participle, on the other hand, make lexicalisation unnecessary: 'tomada/habiendo tomado Roma, los bárbaros...' ['having taken Rome, the barbarians...']; double negatives (lexical or semantic) add to an affirmative: if 'nadie debe dejar de verla' ['nobody must miss it'] then 'deben verla todos' ['everybody should see it'] (nine syllables to six).

We now proceed to a practical example. The following is the beginning of a speech delivered before the UN Disarmament Commission on May 3, 1989:

> "Mr. Chairman, as we are about to conclude this year's session of the UN Disarmament Commission, my delegation would like to make some general observations concerning the work of the Commission. We do so noting with regret that the Commission has not been able to reach agreement on any of the items on the agenda. The UNDC held its first substantive session in May 1979 - ten years ago. Some of the items in this year's agenda have been discussed at each UNDC session for ten consecutive years, without the Commission being able to bring the work on these items to a successful conclusion. It seems to us that the UNDC has gradually ground to a halt on virtually all the main issues on its agenda. This should give all of us food for serious reflection. The idea behind reviving the UNDC at the First Special Session on Disarmament in 1978 --as I recall it-- was to establish a global forum where all Member States would be given the opportunity to take active part in deliberations on disarmament matters; to establish a forum where all Member States could conduct an in-depth discussion on current disarmament affairs; a forum where they could articulate and argue their case. We should ask ourselves whether the UNDC, as it now works, really does serve such a purpose."

Let us look at it. First, a basic feature: although orally transmitted, this is a 'written' text, its redundancy intentional and limited. It would also have been read both at a greater speed and less naturally than if it had been improvised on the spot. Second; it was obviously written by somebody who is not a native speaker of English, or in any event not terribly good at using it. This is a blessing in disguise: we shall feel freer to tinker with the style. I will not attempt to make a thorough analysis; the point made is clearly expressed and easily lifted up from its linguistic and semantic cushions. But let me tell the reader unfamiliar with the U.N. what the Spanish interpreter (himself more than conversant with the subject) can expect his audience to know about the situation. The UNDC is the only U.N. body dealing specifically with disarmament; the U.N. General Assembly has held several special sessions on specific subjects, the one mentioned here is the first of three devoted to disarmament; the speech was being delivered at a moment of reflection upon and evaluation of the work done and the results achieved; it was also one of many that day devoted precisely to the work of the UNDC itself; it was not the only one bewailing the state of affairs. Everybody in the room was perfectly aware of all this and much more; they had heard this delegate many times; they knew him and knew his country's position on this and every other aspect of the issue. The country is a large donor of development aid, and is respected by North and South (our parlance for developed and developing world) and East and West. In a word: when this speaker spoke, people perked up. Here is a possible translation into Spanish:

"Sr. Presidente, en momentos en que el período de sesiones de este año de la Comisión de Desarme de las Naciones Unidas toca a su fin, mi delegación desearía formular algunas observaciones generales acerca de la labor de la Comisión. Lo hacemos tomando nota con pesar de que la Comisión no ha podido llegar a acuerdo respecto de ninguno de los temas de su programa. La CDUN celebró su primer período de sesiones substantivo en mayo de 1979, hace diez años. Algunos de los temas del programa de este año han venido debatiéndose en cada período de sesiones de la CDUN durante diez años consecutivos, sin que la Comisión pudiese llevar a feliz término los trabajos relativos a ninguno de los temas. Nos parece que la CDUN poco a poco ha ido aminorando su marcha hasta detenerse por completo respecto de prácticamente todos los temas principales de su programa. Ello debiera llamarnos a todos a reflexionar seriamente. El propósito con que, en 1978, se dio nuevo impulso a la CDUN durante el Primer Período Extraordinario de Sesiones dedicado al Desarme --que yo recuerde-- era crear un foro mundial donde todos los Estados Miembros tuvieran oportunidad de participar activamente en las deliberaciones de asuntos de desarme, crear un foro en el que todos los Estados Miembros pudiesen realizar un debate a fondo de los asuntos corrientes de desarme, un foro en que pudieran expresar y defender su posición. Cabría que nos preguntáramos si, como marcha, la CDUN sirve efectivamente a tal fin."

The above is a good 'semantic' translation (full, and as close as possible as the target language will allow), the type Peter Newmark suggests for this sort of texts.11/ I think it can be improved by making it less awkward than the original. For instance:

"Sr. Presidente, ahora que este período de sesiones de la CDUN toca a su fin, mi delegación desearía formular algunas observaciones generales acerca de su labor. Lo hacemos tomando nota con pesar de que la Comisión no ha podido llegar a acuerdo respecto de ninguno de lo temas de su programa. La CDUN celebró su primer período de sesiones substantivo en mayo de 1979, hace diez años. Algunos de los temas del programa de este año han venido debatiéndose en cada período de sesiones de la CDUN durante diez años consecutivos, sin que la Comisión haya podido llevar a feliz término los trabajos relativos a ninguno de los temas. A nuestro juicio, la CDUN poco a poco ha ido aminorando su marcha hasta detenerse por completo respecto de prácticamente todos los temas principales de su programa. Sería bueno que todos nos pusiéramos a reflexionar seriamente por qué. El propósito con que, en 1978, se dio nuevo impulso a la CDUN durante el Primer Período Extraordinario de Sesiones dedicado al Desarme --que yo recuerde-- era crear un foro mundial donde todos los Estados Miembros tuvieran oportunidad de participar activamente en las deliberaciones de asuntos de desarme, crear un foro en el que todos los Estados Miembros pudiesen realizar un debate a

fondo de los asuntos del momento, un foro en que pudieran expresar y defender su posición. Cabría que nos preguntáramos si, como marcha, la CDUN sirve efectivamente a tal fin."

Better, right? And yet... But can we go on improving? Not without becoming 'communicative', I'm afraid. Now let us compare numbers: original text, 220 words; first translation, 250 (a good 14% more); second translation, 230 (still some 5% more). Some researchers would stop here;12/ but I think a next step shall prove most revealing: Original text, 360 syllables; first translation, 500 (40% more!!!!); second translation, 460 (27% more!); and that is making every possible synalepha, down to /**periodo**/ and /**criar**/, plus counting CDUN as /**zedún**/. Other things being equal (and they are not!), it would take the interpreter roughly 30% more time to utter the shorter version than it would take the speaker to finish his speech.13/ Either the interpreter steamrolls his translation at almost twice the speed (which may be possible, but at the cost of intelligibility) or he compresses.

Let us take a look at the obvious lexical redundancies in the original:

> "Mr. Chairman, as we are about to conclude this year's session of the UNDC, my delegation would like to make some general observations concerning its [the] work [of the Commission]. We do so noting with regret that the Commission has not been able to reach agreement on any items on its agenda. The UNDC held its first substantive session in May 1979 [- ten years ago]. Some of the items in this year's agenda have been discussed at each UNDC session for ten [consecutive] years, without the Commission being able to bring the work on them [these items] to a successful conclusion. It seems to us that the UNDC has gradually ground to a halt on virtually all its [the] main issues [on its agenda]. This should give all of us food for serious reflection. The idea behind reviving the UNDC at the First Special Session on Disarmament in 1978 --as I recall it-- was to establish a global forum where all Member States would be given the opportunity to take active part in deliberations on disarmament matters; [to establish a forum where all Member States could] conduct an in-depth discussion on current disarmament affairs; and [a forum where they could] articulate and argue their case. We should ask ourselves whether the UNDC, as it now works, really does serve such a purpose."

We have thus saved almost 40 syllables, a nice 10%. What would our second translation end up like thus amended?

> **"Sr. Presidente, ahora que este período de sesiones de la CDUN toca a su fin, mi delegación desearía formular algunas observaciones generales acerca de su labor. Lo hacemos**

> tomando nota con pesar de que la Comisión no ha podido llegar a acuerdo respecto de ninguno de lo temas de su programa. La CDUN celebró su primer período de sesiones substantivo en mayo de 1979 [hace diez años]. Algunos de los temas [del programa] de este año han venido debatiéndose en cada período de sesiones de la CDUN durante diez años [consecutivos], sin que la Comisión pudiese llevar a feliz término los trabajos sobre [relativos a] ninguno [de ellos]. A nuestro juicio, la CDUN poco a poco ha ido aminorando su marcha hasta detenerse por completo respecto de prácticamente todos los temas principales de su programa. Sería bueno que todos nos pusiéramos a reflexionar seriamente por qué. El propósito con que, en 1978, se dio nuevo impulso a la CDUN durante el Primer Período Extraordinario de Sesiones dedicado al Desarme --que yo recuerde-- era crear un foro mundial donde todos los Estados Miembros tuvieran oportunidad de participar activamente en las deliberaciones de asuntos de desarme, [crear un foro en el que todos los Estados Miembros pudiesen] realizar un debate a fondo de los asuntos del momento y [un foro en que] pudieran expresar y defender su posición. Cabría que nos preguntáramos si, como marcha, la CDUN sirve efectivamente a tal fin."

Only 40 syllables saved (we had already introduced some of the improvements from the very beginning); the translation becomes now over 30% longer than the original. Without its awkwardness and a couple of non-awkward redundant elements, the original proves even more unmanageable. But are all those words and syllables really necessary? No more than all the words and syllables in this paper. How many times have I said the same thing, over and over (and I'm not finished yet!)? Of course, the speaker and I are not stupid, nor do we believe our interlocutors to be. But what is it that he is really saying; what is his point? A rather simple one, I think: the UNDC is far from working as well as it should. A Spanish version thereof would simply be: 'Sr. Presidente, la CDUN no marcha'. No interpreter in his right mind would dream of paring the text down to that (unless he realises he has neglected to turn on the mike and that is the only alternative to omitting this paragraph altogether - and it happens all the time!). Or unless he is not a full-fledged interpreter at all, but a wretched student, drawn into an uneven struggle against nerves, insecurity, lack of habit, inexperience, a dismal speed, a dreadful accent, an implacable teacher, and cruel classmates. Would this not be preferable to something more or less like the following:

> "Sr. Presidente, en la medida que la sesión de la Comisión de las Naciones Unidas no ha podido del programa en mayo de 1879 en conclusión exitosa nos parece que se detuvo su agenda para alimentar la reflexión seria del período extraordinario de sesiones dedicado al desarme para participar activamente en un foro de desarme corriente y no sirve para ese propósito."

("Mr. Chairman, as the session of the United Nations Committee has not been able the agenda in May 1879 to a successful conclusion it seems to us it ground to a halt its agenda to food for reflection would be the Special Session on Disarmament was to take active participation in a current disarmament forum and does not really serve such a purpose.")

If our student had properly understood what is really expected of him, he would have waited until he had grasped the main idea and only then said it in two words, hoping to be able, next time around, to couch it in four. But he would have come up with a text, scanty, insufficient, but basically accurate and plausible. The one above, instead, is hopeless. But let's get back to us veterans. Can we trim our translation without cutting off any of the meat?

"Señor, ahora que este período de sesiones de la CDUN toca a su fin, desearíamos formular algunas observaciones generales lamentando que la Comisión no haya podido convenir en ninguno de lo temas de su programa. La CDUN celebro su primer período substantivo hace diez años. Algunos de los temas llevan debatiéndose esos diez años sin que la Comisión haya podido evacuar ninguno. En casi todos los principales, nos parece, la CDUN poco a poco se ha estancado. Pensemos por qué. En el 78 la Asamblea le dio nuevo impulso --que yo recuerde-- para crear un foro mundial donde todos los Estados pudieran participar activamente en las deliberaciones de desarme, debatir a fondo los asuntos pertinentes y expresar y defender su posición. Preguntémonos si, como marcha, la CDUN sirve efectivamente a tal fin."

("Sir, at the end of this UNDC session, we would like to make some general observations, while lamenting that the Commission has not been able to agree about any of the items. The UNDC held its first substantive session ten years ago. Some of the items have been discussed over those ten years without the Commission being able to finish any of them. With respect to almost all the main ones, we believe, it has gradually bogged down. Let us think why. Back in '78, the Assembly revived it --as I recollect-- to establish a forum where all States could take part in deliberations on disarmament, discuss in depth relevant affairs, and articulate and argue their case. Let us ask ourselves whether the Commission, as it works, does really serve that purpose." [210 syllables])

Number of syllables... 250!

We might as well take a look at a possible abstracting relying on the knowledge of the situation shared by speaker, interpreter and audience:

"Señor. No hemos podido convenir ni un tema, y eso que algunos llevan diez años debatiéndose. ¿Por qué nos

hemos estancado tanto? La Comisión tenía un propósito: que todos pudiéramos debatir a fondo el desarme. Como marcha ¿lo puede conseguir?"

("Sir. We haven't been able to agree on any of our items, even though we've been discussing some of them for ten years. Why have we virtually ground to a halt? The Commission had one purpose: that we should all be able to discuss disarmament in depth. Can it achieve it the way it's going?" [75 syllables])

Syllables... 80!! Relevant information embezzled... NONE! Stylistic sacrifices incurred... you must be kidding! Countenance of the Ecuadorean Ambassador who's been trying to remember the position of that particular country in order to relay it by telex to Quito that evening... elated! Look in the Spanish press officer who has to take down everything... blissful! Ideally, of course, the interpreter would be able to do this text both ways. Which one to choose will naturally depend on the situation. Between these extremes lies his path: If he says more, he'll be lying; if he says less, he will be cheating.

It may be argued that the above is a 'political', i.e. non-technical, speech, and that redundancy tends, therefore, to be more rife, and even if it is not, who cares anyway? It is true indeed that technical presentations are prone to be less redundant. Precisely because of that, whatever redundancy there is simply must be taken full advantage of. But technical speeches more often than not offer a different, crucial kind of advantage: the presence of para-linguistic information, shared by both interpreter and his audience, under the guise of images (slides, graphs, etc.). The latter duplicates information linguistically conveyed and can be counted as a substitute thereof. Take the following example: At a seminar on open-heart surgery, a doctor is explaining a specific operation. There is a rather gory slide showing the poor patient's innards in all their splendour. The speaker has his pointer held at a specific spot while saying 'Practicamos nuestra incisión en la vena cava'. Every physician in the audience knows that that is a vein, and that it is called 'vena cava'. If the interpreter translates 'We make our incision here', he is omitting linguistic information made redundant by the image. Not that he should, of course, but he most definitely can; and if he does not know the right term in English, he will be very well advised indeed not to give away his ignorance by saying something preposterous or, worse, misleading. He will have earned his bread by translating the purely linguistic --and therefore inaccessible to those who do not understand the language-- part of the message, while leaving the technical to the eyes of the specialists.14/

We might now take a look at what a real-life text could hold in store. The following is part of a presentation by the Technical Adviser to the U.S. Delegation at the U.N. Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space on the agenda item 'Spin-offs of Space Science and Technology':

"A final biomedical spin-off example involves the use of NASA-developed digital image processing technology. Magnetic Resonance (MR) imaging is a relatively new technique for viewing the inner parts of the human body. Unlike X-rays, which are most sensitive to bone, magnetic resonance is sensitive to softer tissue of the body - like the brain. By using the same computer software and image processing methods developed by NASA for enhancing satellite imagery, medical technicians can now process MR images and more readily distinguish such anomalies as blood clots and tumors from healthy surrounding tissue. NASA-developed computer programs analyze digital information obtained from MR body scans, sharpen contrasts of different tissue, eliminate confusing detail and produce images in which various features are shown in different color. Such 'issue maps' now enable more rapid and early diagnosis of many internal physiological disorders than ever before."

Now for the situation: This was the Outer Space Committee. This interpreter and the audience were not familiar with medicine, nor were they expecting this kind of subject (and vocabulary) to show up. The speaker used a projector to illustrate his intervention. The slides shown more or less matched the different descriptions in the text. For instance, the process of colour-differentiation mentioned in the last but one sentence was clearly shown by way of the 'normal' and 'coloured' versions of the same image. The speaker read awkwardly and at an infelicitous speed. All of the presentation referred to NASA-developed technology. This was the way I managed to do it:

"Un último caso es nuestra tecnología de procesamiento digital de imágenes por resonancia magnética (RM). Se trata de una técnica novel que permite ver el interior del organismo. A diferencia de los rayos X, la RM es sensible a los tejidos blandos, como el cerebral. Con los programas y métodos que usamos para las imágenes satelitales,15/ los técnicos pueden ahora procesar las obtenidas por RM para distinguir más fácilmente del tejido circundante coágulos, tumores, etc. Nuestros programas electrónicos analizan la información obtenida mediante RM, agudizando el contraste entre diferentes tejidos y eliminando los detalles superfluos. Se logran así imágenes en que diversos rasgos aparecen en color distinto, lo cual permite un diagnóstico de muchos desórdenes más rápido y precoz que nunca."

("One last instance is our digital magnetic resonance (MR) image processing. This is a novel technique allowing us to view the inner parts of the body. Unlike X-rays, MR is sensitive to soft tissues, such as the brain's. With the same software and methods we use for satellite imagery, technicians can now process MR images to distinguish more readily clots, tumors, etc. from the surrounding tissue. Our computer programmes analyse information obtained through MR, sharpening

contrasts between different tissues and eliminating superfluous detail. Thus images are achieved in which various features are shown in different colour, which enables a quicker and earlier than ever diagnosis of many disorders." [195 syllables])

We shall next examine the information that has been 'lost': 1) 'biomedical spin-off example involves the use of'(the kind of phrase one should always be merciful enough to do away with); 2) 'NASA-developed' (NASA is systematically replaced by the first person plural, which allows for much savings, since the word is used ad nauseam throughout the text; besides, as I have pointed out, everything mentioned in this presentation has been 'NASA-developed'); 3) 'human body' (obviously not any other animal's); 4) 'digital image-processing technology' (the context makes this noun redundant, especially in Spanish); 5) 'X-rays, which are sensitive to bone' (first, not to 'bone' but to 'bone tissue'; second, the audience can be safely assumed to know that much; third, the difference becomes clear in the next phrase anyway); 6) 'computer software and image processing methods' (it is already or it will become clear enough); 7) 'medical technicians' (which other ones?); 8) 'can now process MR images' (obvious redundancy); 9) 'such anomalies as blood clots' (tumors and clots are obviously anomalous, and the etc. covers the 'such ... as'); 10) 'surrounding healthy tissue' (the nature of the surrounding tissue is immaterial, the anomalies must still be distinguished from each other); 11) 'analyze digital information obtained' (it is already specified at the beginning), 12) 'body scans' (I did not know exactly what the expression meant --though I had a very good idea-- nor did I have the foggiest notion about how to render it in Spanish; it is evident, nevertheless, that it adds nothing at all to the point. Now that I have found out --'sondeos'-- I would still omit it); 13) 'tissue maps' (besides the difficulty of producing a smooth Spanish equivalent other than simply 'mapas', the expression is absolutely unnecessary); and 14) 'internal physiological disorders' (the text has spoken of nothing but).

This translation is, to my mind, much clearer than the original. But let us count some syllables: the original amounts to some 285, the 'abstract' version, to 265; a meager 5% less (but more than 35% above 'its' English counterpart; thanks God for redundancy!). Imagine how long would the 'full' translation have turned out to be. Supposing I'd had the ability to come up with it and say it, would it have been intelligible? Would it not have been at times very clumsy? Would I have had the extra time and energy to exhume from my unconscious the terms for 'clot' and 'early', and to realise that 'confusing' meant 'interfering' and think of 'superfluo', the three of which so much contribute to overall tone and clarity? Not I, believe me; not in a million years!

Needless to emphasise, this skills must be taught and practiced. There's simply no way a beginner will think of them on his own, much less try and use them. The essential thing to hammer

down is that the interpreter should be listening for ideas; as if the text were addressed to him, not as a linguistic artifact, but as a message with a specific sense to be grasped and only then relayed. This way, the interpreter is taking maximum advantage of his effort: he will discard non-relevant linguistic information, first and foremost simple redundancies; next he will extract the basic sense; he will then try and articulate it as briefly and clearly as possible without marring the style of the original (and, more often than not, vastly improving upon it); and, finally, he will deliver his shorter version with poise and clarity, making full use of intonation and pauses to make up for whatever secondary information has been relinquished.

Before I wind up, a last and --I should hope-- self-evident caveat: I am not asserting that the interpreter must always abstract or compress no matter what. But I am indeed stressing that whenever the situation allows for or demands it, he must be able to do so, and do it right. The ability to abstract ought to be among his most basic and cherished qualifications. An interpreter who cannot abstract is very much like a soldier who, once out of ammunition, doesn't know any better than surrender. Many of the best interpreters have realised this and systematically use the method; others apply it without being quite aware. But all of us have had to learn it our own hard way. Don't we owe it to our aspiring colleagues to let them in on it?

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* This article is a development of the paper "Teaching Beginners the Blessings of Compressing (And How to Save a Few Lives in the Process)", submitted to the 30th ATA Conference, held in Washington, D.C.

NOTES:

1/ See Chernov (1987), Delisle and García-Landa (1985) and, especially (1984). García Landa's article on the "Theory and Practice of Interpretation" simply must be read. Most of the points I am trying to make here are brilliantly covered and analysed therein. (And if you think my approach is too liberal, just read him!)

2/ See, among others, García Landa (1984), Roothauer; Searle (1987a and b); and Viaggio (1987) and (1988a).

3/ Seleskovitch has a wonderfully simple way of defining sense: "the awareness of things meant by the speaker" (1989), p. 68. See also Viaggio (1988a); and, naturally, García Landa (1984).

4/ This paper had already been written and edited, when I chanced upon Chernov's gem of a work. The first effect thereof was a change in the title (see note 8/ below). I entreat anybody who can read Russian to become acquainted with this piece. The

statistical and experimental data are invaluable and the conceptual framework astonishingly solid and comprehensive.

5/ See Gile (1985b) and Viaggio (1988b).

6/ See, among others, Déjean Le Féal (1985), Delisile, García Landa (1984), and Seleskovitch (1989), who has this other gem of an aphorism "listening for words is a misguided way of listening", p. 74.

7/ I also use sight reading for vocabulary expansion and syntax development (that really makes four, doesn't it?), see Viaggio (1988b).

8/ Different authors use different terms ('abridging', 'summarizing', 'abstracting', 'condensing', 'compressing', etc.). I have chosen 'compressing' after Chernov (1987). I suggest the first three can be used for 'semantic' and the latter two for 'syllabic/graphic' economy.

9/ (1989) p. 74 [my italics]. A crucial aphorism: that is why waiting for sense is so important. Only once aware of the thing meant by the speaker can the interpreter say it. See García Landa (1984) for an excellent elaboration thereupon.

10/ For my own development of this idea, see Viaggio (1987), otherwise too 'linguistic' a paper for my present taste.

11/ For the reader unfamiliar with the concepts, may I give here a very succinct explanation: according to Newmark, what he calls 'authoritative' statements (such as the one being discussed) ought to be translated "as closely as the semantic and syntactic structures of the second language allow [reproducing] the exact contextual meaning of the original" ((1981), p. 39). He calls this kind of translation 'semantic', as opposed to 'communicative', where the rendition "attempts to produce on its readers an effect as close as possible to that obtained on the readers of the original" (ibid.). In his thoughtful, beautifully written, yet exasperatingly dogmatic book, Newmark provides no hint as to what to do when the original is both 'authoritative' and somewhat 'defective', as is the case I am discussing; what an 'improved' version would attempt to do is produce on its readers the effect the author was trying (although less successfully) to produce on his. It is, I hope, self-evident that whenever the original is defective due to linguistic 'incompetence' (in the Chomskian sense) on the part of the author, the translation/interpretation must be better, since the translator/interpreter has no alibi for his own incompetence.

12/ Chernov (1987), Lederer (1981), and Seleskovitch (1981), (1984) and (1989) talk about words per minute. Alone among all my sources, Chernov introduces the concept of syllable amount - and only tacitly at that. In view of the obvious difference in average syllables per word in English, French, Italian, Russian and Spanish

(the languages I know something about), I believe 'word' is too misleading a unit (and though I know no German, I've seen a few 'words', not to speak about Welsh). As far as the examples quoted here --and the ones in Chernov-- it is more than obvious that such is the case; but I would be the last one to construct a theory on a few random cases.

13/ My colleague, Lynn Visson, has pointed out to me that the average amount of syllables typically uttered at any given speech 'tempo' is probably not the same in all languages. According to Chernov's sources, the average syllable duration for most of the European languages is 200 milliseconds. If that is indeed the case, there would be no significant difference between English and Spanish; but even if there were, I imagine the numbers would vary depending on what dialect we pick. I do still think, though, that 30% more syllables means a lot of extra parroting no matter how glibber we Spanish speakers may be (and we cannot squeeze 'satellite' into /sadlit/!).

14/ Two cases in point: 1) This year (1989) I was assigned without prior warning to a committee of experts on accounting. My audience consisted of two Argentines, one Uruguayan and a Peruvian. I approached them and alerted them to the fact that I had no knowledge of the Spanish terminology. They said "Don't worry; we don't know English, but we understand the English terms; just use them." I promised I'd do my best, but trembled before the idea of what Russian might have in store. As it turned out, the Soviet delegate also used the English terms. And he explained why: "I know they may be difficult for the interpreters, and I want to be understood." 2) A couple of years ago I was doing my beloved Outer Space Scientific and Technical Subcommittee (I did know the relevant terminology that time around). The Soviet speech was a model of clarity and was being blissfully delivered. Easy as apple pie. But all of a sudden I simply could not think of the Spanish word for 'detalizatsia'... My mind just went blank. So I concocted detallación and went ahead. As soon as I finished I managed to add "I know there's no such word as 'detallación', but I couldn't remember the right one." My audience lifted up their eyes, smiled and nodded. Ah, the mirth of shared situationality!

15/ Yes, 'satelitales' (I do sometimes hear myself say 'satelístico', but I don't like it); it is high time we dared enrich our Spanish language with much needed verbs, nouns and adjectives (properly derived, of course).

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